· MIHRIMA ·

AND OTHER POEMS

CALE YOUNG RICE

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MIHRIMA
AND OTHER POEMS

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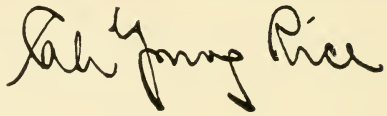
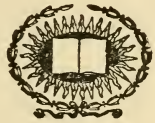


MIHRIMA
AND OTHER POEMS

BY

CALE YOUNG RICE

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWY THRESHOLDS," "WRAITHS AND REALITIES," "COLLECTED PLAYS AND POEMS," ETC.



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no 1

TO MY FRIEND
CHARLES SNEED WILLIAMS
WHO IN ANOTHER ART HAS SO OFTEN
REVEALED THE BEAUTY OF TRUTH

FOREWORD

This volume contains four lyrics which are only to be found now in "Sea Poems" and "Songs to A. H. R."—collections from former volumes which will not be republished.

It is unwise, perhaps, for an author to say any but a final farewell to a literary form he has found fascinating, but the drama "Mihrima" is, I think, the last of its kind I shall write.

CALE YOUNG RICE

Louisville, Ky.
August, 1922

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MIHRIMA

MIHRIMA

Dramatis Personae

ARGOUN....*An astrologer believed to be descended from one of the Magi.*

PHRANZES..*His son.*

SALHA.....*His daughter by an Arab mother.*

MIHRIMA..*The wife of Phranzes: A Greek.*

ALEXIA ....*Her mother.*

MURZINOS..*A dissolute noble of Constantinople.*

ARSLAN....*A relic seller serving him.*

LEAH.....*A handmaid to Mihrima.*

TWO NUNS.

MIHRIMA

The scene is a large upper chamber in the house of Argoun at Jerusalem toward the close of the

16th century. Through a rear door it looks eastward over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the Mount of Olives. Though Levantine in fashion, it has instead of hangings on its bluish walls three pictures: one, left, of the Magi following the Star; one, right, of the gifts in the Manger; and one, over the rear door, of the Crucifixion.

Two other doors, curtained, open right and left to other parts of the house, and beyond the rear door is a gallery giving down to the street gate. A divan, right, has a wine table by it. To the left centre stands another table covered with byssus cloth and holding a strange crucifix, resembling an ikon, together with several astronomical instruments. There are other seats.

Through the wide rear door the dome of the Church, the city roofs and the Sacred Mount glow under the glorifying gold of the declining

sun. A chant drifts in at whiles from the Sepulchre Church, moving and mystical.

Argoun, an impressive old man of few words, but of intense, almost fanatical, purpose, sits at the crucifix table. In his hands is an astral chart which he searches, troubled. His perplexity causes him to rise, at length, and to speak.

ARGOUN.

The wounds of Christ, the Holy Star, the Cross
All mingle strangely in her horoscope,
But thro a shadow past my power to pierce.
In its eclipse the Holy Star passes,
The wounds and Cross immutably abide.—
Tonight Venus again will be in the House
Of Virgo, and again I must essay. . . .

[*His eyes fall on the crucifix which he lifts and gazes at half superstitiously. The chant in the Church ceases.*

Leah, the handmaid, enters silently, but

in terror, behind him—as if pursued. Her knees give way under her and she lets fall a pannier of fruit she bears.

ARGOUN [*startled but not turning*].

Phranzes?

LEAH. No, great searcher of the skies,

[*Does obeisance.*

Not he, but one as earth under his feet.
And under yours, O rabbi of the stars,
For so intruding hither at this hour
Upon the astral trouble of your thought.
But there has chanced to me upon the street
A word such as—how shall I say it?—have
The heavens not told you anything?
It is the Star of Bethlehem, men say,
That you and he, my noble master Phranzes,
Watching now on the Mount of Olives,
Expect again to grow out of the East,
As in the ancient time leading the Wise Men.

But do they not say too . . . . it will not come . . .

[*Distressed, hesitant.*

To any house . . .

ARGOUN. To any house, what?

[*Seats himself.*

LEAH.

Wherein . . .

ARGOUN [*after waiting*]. Well, wherein. . . ?

LEAH. . . . . Can I say it?

Oh, sir, can I? Breathing even to you
What I have heard would shame my heart and lips.
For she, who is the halo of this house,
Who is the very presence of its peace,
Who with her own white hands of beauty bore me
Miraculously out from among the lepers
That I was born amid. . .

ARGOUN [*starts*]. Mihrima?

LEAH.

She never could have been . . . less than purity.

[*Beseeching him.*

And tho this relic seller whom I met,
As I was coming hither from the market
With pomegranates and figs against the morrow,
May one have known her there, as artfully
And meaningly he tells, there in her home,
Her one time home the city of Constantine,
He could not know, oh star-wise sir, nor could
The lord he calls his master Murzinos,
That she was not. . . . . .

[*Argoun's expression is so grave that she breaks off. Indeed so strong an agitation takes solemn hold of him that he rises. Yet when he speaks it is rather to himself.*

ARGOUN.

This, then, is the shadow that has fallen
Across my thoughts of her, despite the wounds
Of Christ which my vision fixed upon her!
Seeing deception in Alexia,
As I have. . . .
Concealment of some past that well might prove
As quicksands under all our aspirations,
Have I trusted the mercy of mere chance,
Not the surety of stars within my ken,
Until, now, calamity is ready
To topple at its heaviest upon us?

LEAH [*sinking down, again distressedly*].

But, sir . . . . . it is not true? . . . . It
cannot be? . . .
[*Implores him.*
My mistress. . . . ?

ARGOUN. Is, wench . . . [*after a pause*]
. . . but what she is.
And what she is is not for your concernment.

Therefore be silent . . . . . and obedient.
For there 's more here to mind than your hand-wringings.

[*After considering.*

Yes, so go, and bring me lady Alexia.
Or no; I 'll go myself. Stay you rather
There by the door and watch. If any arrive,
This Murzinos or his relic seller, warn us.

[*He goes to door left and knocks, but receives no answer.*

He knocks again and calls.

Alexia! . . . . Ho! . . . . Alexia!

[*After waiting.*

I say, are you within, Alexia!

[*A voice—it is Alexia's—replies affrontedly. Then after a moment Alexia herself appears.*

An imposing, self-willed woman, she comes down arrogantly. She is much berobed and jewelled.

ALEXIA.

Why am I summoned here?
Why by you summoned, not by a servant?
Why is my rest broken at this hour?

ARGOUN [*who hears her out; then speaks overawingly*].

Because, woman of subterfuge, the drift
Of all your indirection now is on you.
Silence has been a lie that may destroy,
A vain deception ready here to shatter
The happiness and hope of all this house.
Yes, I say! . . . My son has wed your daughter;
And since within the purple of his veins
There flows the blood of a King who brought incense
And myrrh out of the East. . .

ALEXIA [*scornfully*]. Since there does?

ARGOUN.

Then he—

ALEXIA. What? . . . gives you a title here,
And in the presence of this low wench of the lepers,
To pour, thus, reproachful words on me?
Am I a slave, am I a dog, a Gadarene,
To suffer it?

ARGOUN. No . . . but a Greek from the city of Constantine,
Therefore a weaver of wiles and of ambitions.

ALEXIA.
Then you shall know, star-meddler, that I wear
Grecian courage to avow to you—

[*A cry from Leah, at the door, sharply interrupts her; and angrily bewildered she sees Leah shrink towards Argoun, as a laugh from without, rings derisively.*

LEAH.
It is he, sir: here! . . . the relic seller!
He is pushing past the keeper and mounts up.

Let him not! . . . For he is evil, and sows
But falsities . . . His words of my mistress. . . .

[*Arslan appears, in the midst of her plea, at the door. He looks back with a jibe at the baffled keeper.*

An unctuous, impudent knave with scrip and staff, he comes down salaaming. Alexia beholds him with rage.

ARSLAN.

Your honors, astral lord and Grecian lady,
Greeting! . . . [*again salaaming*] . . . Greeting!
I give you greeting! . . . . .
In this abode, I learn, one Phranzes dwells,
He of the mighty Magi. It is well:
For I have business he will thank me for.
What, ask you?

[*Nimbly opening his scrip.*

I have a relic kissed by the Archimandrate,

The Patriarch and thirty Holy Prelates,
To bring the Star for him. Lady, the Star!
Ay . . . . lady! . . . Ay! . . . And you shall see it!

[*Searches scrip.*

A relic wonderful as a saint's dream,
A meteor stone that fell in Bethlehem
With "Christus" writ upon it, and that only!
A stone that is a sign. . . . . See you, see!

[*He finds and displays the stone showily before her. For a moment she witholds her wrath, then it breaks.*

ALEXIA.

Panderer! . . . . . Church-jackal! . . . . .
Pilgrim-cozener!
Cheater of frowsy fools! Fatted impostor!
How dare you press, thus, across our threshold,
And thrust, so, your insolent stench upon us?

[*To Argoun.*

You have brought him? *you?* . . Speak! Who
is he?

ARSLAN [*mockingly deprecatory*].

Oh, fair lady! No. I come alone.
For I am a mere humble relic seller,
A poor wandering soul, upon a journey
Out of Armenia on pilgrimage.
[*Suddenly, meaningly.*
But travelling with a lord—

ALEXIA. Who bids you, rat,
Run where you will and gnaw wherever you
run?
Blood of the Cross, that can do miracles,
Is our abode to be so desecrated
In sight and sound of the very Sepulchre?

ARSLAN.

Nay, proud lady! Nay! . . Privacy
Is sanctity. But since my lord seeks you,
And since--

ALEXIA. I know him not.

ARSLAN. Since he seeks you,
And since—

ALEXIA. He is nought to me, offal!

ARSLAN [*suddenly sinister*].
Nor to your daughter, lady? *to your daughter?*
His name . . . if you will hear . . . is Murzinos.

[*Dismay and consternation wrench Alexia. She is shaken by the name as by a bolt.*

ALEXIA.
Murzinos!

ARSLAN. Even so, lady.

[*Coolly puts away his relic.*

And you, I see, have still some memory of it.

[*A pause. All wait the event.*

ALEXIA [*to Argoun whose eyes have fixed her*].
Leave me . . . leave me alone with him . . . alone.
This is nothing—but a remembered name

Malevolently recalled. . . . Go and take with you
This waxen wench of the lepers. I will hear him.
His master, who is dead, I know . . . or knew.
If there is anything . . . . . I pray you, go.

[*Argoun loftily suspicious moves to the door. Leah in haste passes through the curtains before him. Alexia in clenched bitterness seats herself—Arslan before her.*

ALEXIA [*not turning to him*].

If you have flung at me a cunning lie
And not a viperous truth, say at once.
Murzinos *is* not drowned, as was told me
By the assembled tongue of witnesses
Who found his body dead in the Bosphorus?

ARSLAN.

He lives, lady, and sends his greetings to you.

ALEXIA [*rising*].

I 'll not be duped. He was found floating

Near his felucca in the gray of dawn.
Such resurrection is not possible.

ARSLAN [*merely shrugging*].

Then, lady, will you buy a relic of me?
Armenian saints are the most powerful
And I have here the nail-parings of three,
The scapular of one and of Saint—

ALEXIA. Oh! [*quivering*].

He *is* not dead? But still
Walks upon earth, shameless and dissolute?
Walks as men whose shadow do not foul it?
And now is in Jerusalem?

ARSLAN. Three days.

ALEXIA

And seeks? seeks her?

ARSLAN. You have known him, lady.
[*Nearer; and speaking low.*

And yet . . . he has not found her. Only *I* have.
Tho if he does . . . if he sees your daughter—

Whom I an hour since saw setting forth
Pale as the cloistered hope of any nun
With Argoun's Moslem daughter to the Sepulchre—
If he beholds her . . . whom he still craves . . .
And learns that now she calls her husband "Phranzes". . .

ALEXIA.

Never must he, evil and relentless,
If there is any power that has cunning,
Or cunning that has power, to prevent it.
His glance never again shall stain her beauty.

ARSLAN [*closer*].

Then . . . lady . . . what if I have a relic
That will defend her? that will lure him off?
One to be bought; one, too, that is sure?
Would you, my lady, buy it? . . . .
[*Their eyes meet.*
Ay . . . he . . . Murzinos, is my master:
That be granted:

But since he leaves a thirst in me unquenched,
A thirst for the yellow pour of pretty gold,
The relic you can buy from me—is silence.

ALEXIA [*slowly*].

And treachery? . . . tho who buys a traitor
Knows well that traitors serve only themselves?
No! . . . [*desperate*]. And yet . . . yes! I 'll buy. But you
Shall swear, knave, by the Tomb, your relic *is* one,
That it will lead Murzinos from this city
At once, to any other, by any guile,
And that . . . . . [*starts*] How? . . . . . .
Is that feet at the gate?
[*Listens.*

ARSLAN [*also startled and gliding to door to look out*].

The Moslem maid! . . . hurrying breathlessly!
Ay, and alone! . . . Mihrima is not with her.

[*He stands apart, as the stir without increases. Salha then enters, keen, dark, Arabic, aquiver. With pride of mien she casts her veil away from her.*

SALHA.

I came before. Mishap has taken her.
A couch is here? and Christian wine? She swooned.
We were beside the Sepulchre—

ALEXIA [*blenching*] My daughter?

SALHA.

Your daughter. Many were there, many with tapers,
Chanting and praying, weeping, penitent,
As your religion bids . . . . . I like it not.
No, by the Prophet . . . . . and I would my father
Would turn to Allah . . . . But, she stood there praying,
Her veil by chance a little loosed from her

And vision on her face. Then, suddenly,
I saw . . . her eyes fix.

ALEXIA. On . . . what? On whom?

SALHA.

Am I to say? Her soul is mysteries
And voices that I am not prophet to.
But not far distant from her gaze there stood
A lord . . . a Byzantine . . . his eyes upon her
As I have seen a Bedouin's upon
His steed found in the desert . . . Ha! Bismallah!
And then . . . But this is words: she will return:
There should be preparation. [*Pausing, listening*] She is near!
[*Goes quickly to door.*
Yes . . . And with her come the two white nuns

Whose mercy tended her while I ran on.

[*Turning and seeing Arslan.*

But who—? Another Byzantine? among us? . . .

[*Mihrima's approach leaves no time for reply. Between the two nuns, though unsupported, she enters. An unearthly pallor clings to her, yet her beauty, golden-haired, seems almost to possess an aura. Her voice, as Alexia starts toward her, is hushed yet enthralling.*

MIHRIMA.

No, mother! Let not words yet beat on me
Where silently the wings of God have beaten.

[*Arslan slips out.*

Here are good friends [*of the nuns*] who have been gracious, kind
As dew upon my sudden withering.
I thank them and shall thank their convent altar,

A refuge from the intemperable world,
With offerings. [*To them*] Now, friends, will you leave me?

A Nun [*still solicitous*].

If you are strong, daughter. Your sinking down—

Mihrima.

I am, quite, quite . . . So, may peace go with you,
Such as is found only within your walls.

[*They pass out, led by Salha, but still hesitant.*

Alexia then turns in trepidation to Mihrima—who stands as one fixed under divine fate.

Alexia.

And now, my child?

Mihrima. There is no now, mother,
No peaceful, holy now in all the world,
Nor ever again shall be thro the long years,

But only the past arisen from its tomb
To live in and around and with me ever.

ALEXIA.

Words, but words! What have you seen?

MIHRIMA. A ghost,
A ghost made flesh again—O very flesh!
For do not think I who have had deep visions
In which Christ walked upon my spirit's sea,
As on the waves of Galilee, am dreaming.
He stood there. . . .

ALEXIA. He?

MIHRIMA. Abhorrent: Murzinos.
I had but lifted up my eyes to pray
That unto Phranzes soon might come the Star
When I beheld him—the embodied shame
Of my one time unhappiness before me.
And now . . . I have two husbands.

ALEXIA Girl [*angrily cautious*] . . . no!
[*Looking around.*
And will have *none* if curtains have ears—none.

You have but one and he—

MIHRIMA. Two! . . . Two!
One dissolute and faithless who had left me,
As I believed—and as I hoped—forever;
And one—

ALEXIA. Who alone is. Be silent, then.
For Murzinos, who so abandoned you,
And who deceived you, is none.

MIHRIMA. Tho God knows it?
And my own soul, to which a presage ever
Has sought to come and whisper that he lives?

ALEXIA.
And which is ever a silly convent dupe?
A prey to voices and to visions which
May now make ruin of us? No, I say.
I am your mother and command your silence.

MIHRIMA [*with all reverence*].
And I'm your daughter. Yet I've sent for
Phranzes.

ALEXIA.

Girl! sent! to tell him!

MIHRIMA. Tho the shame strangle me.
For without qualm or question did he wed me,
Swept to it, as he thought, by all star-signs,
Nor doubting that my heart's true innocence
Might mean less . . . than perfect virginity.
You, mother, who bethrothed me to him, kept
Truth from him . . . as until too late I learned.
And I, since, have held it,
Hoping by some sweet miracle of God,
Or by some vision given at the hour
The Star again shall rise out of the East,
To take away the sting of what he learns.
But now—

ALEXIA. Now, Ingratitude, nun-coddled!
Callow, contumacious Disobedience!
Now you mean . . . . . [*angry, tearful*]
So it is with mothers!

They travail only to be spurned by children.
Would I had never given you birth! . . .
Never conceived a daughter for my woe.
Thus I am dealt with, I who get her husbands,
I her own mother, practising deception
To win them for her. I—

MIHRIMA. Would you had not.
And would that Murzinos had never seen me,
But left me to the convent's quiet arms,
Which I was born to, as I sometimes think,
More nun than wife, in spite of my poor beauty.
But since you did not, since the world had touched me
Terribly once, I hoped, when Phranzes came
In quest of the Star, to give him all my soul,
That had been only God's,
And all my body . . . that is only dust.
And now I have, loving him as I love
These streets that once were trod by feet divine.

So when he comes, mother—

ALEXIA [*who has flung herself on the divan but who springs up as Mihrima moves toward the door*].

He shall hear curses on you!
From your own mother whom you would betray,
Who gave you birth, who suckled you, who bred you,
Raising you beauty up to woman height
That it might lift you higher, and lift me;
And who, now, at length, after the failure
Of Murzinos, have wedded you to one
Who born of the Magi yet may be a king
If only—

[*Wrath and tears compel her to desist*

MIHRIMA [*in an effort to restrain her*].

Mother! . . .

ALEXIA. I am forsaken! disobeyed!
I 'll die of it! die! That only is left me.

You are daughter to your father—who turned priest

And did not know he lived in the world . . .

I 'll die!

[*Starting towards curtains.*

And may my death be on you.

MIHRIMA [*holding her*]. Mother! . . . mother! . . .

ALEXIA.

I'll die!

MIHRIMA. . . . . This is illness and not reason,

[*Casting about for help.*

And may be heard . . . For, if someone . . . . . Ah!

[*Believes she hears a step—the one she awaits.*

Phranzes! It is Phranzes; come at last!

[*She releases Alexia and turns towards the door. A figure, that of Murzinos, appears within it. Florid yet sinister, he comes down towards her smiling; his eyes are such as nothing could make happy; his*

restlessness is a disease, a hot obsession.
Mihrima is as one transfixed. Yet as her arms, which she had held out, fall slowly to her sides, a strength that seems transcendent sweeps into her. She stands abhorring yet hallowed.

MURZINOS [*dashed, yet assuming assurance*].

This is your eyrie then, my bird of God?
Here you have flown, and here, still wonderful,
At last are found? . . . I greet you and your mother,
Whom I in folly let believe me dead.
[*Scanning their surroundings.*
Wealth, fragrance, wine? Not ill, my lily.
Solomon's magic is it that provides,
Or some discovered kinsman's? [*To Alexia*].
You, lady,
Do not, I venture, violently scorn it.

ALEXIA [*hatred hooking her hands*].

If I could kill you . . . ! If the heat of Hell

Would burn up from the Pit and shrivel you!
If Heaven would fling a fiery rage of lightning
To pinion you to earth, or if the sky—

MIHRIMA [*preventing Alexia's lifted hands from striking*].

Blows, mother, are vain. Murzinos
And God and I must have this hour alone,
Tho to eternity it sear my soul.
Therefore go . . . go. What speaks in me
Is more than me and must be heard. Today
Hands Divine shall save this house or sink it.

[*Prevailing, she leads Alexia off, door left. Her mien is almost praeternatural. Slowly then she turns.*

MURZINOS [*who has watched admiringly*].

Done as a queen, an empress, Mihrima,
Or as one of a diviner right!
And your perfection is unchanged, unchangeable!

Your face I could not lose in other faces
Or places, tho the fairest of the world!
I have done well in so returning to you!

MIHRIMA.

Then, do ill! for now your least approaching,
Your merest touch, would be a sacrilege
That 's infinite—and not to me alone.

MURZINOS [*drawing nearer*].

Because I am not purged? Then, I *will* be,
I will, ay, of every unchastity,
By priests and absolution—if no touch
Of you may. I will cleanse me and consent
Even to stern absentment from your beauty,
But only . . . . . till I rewin it!

MIHRIMA [*inviolably*]. Which, Murzinos,
Can never be: know that, . . .
Till Dead Sea apples grow in Paradise.

MURZINOS.

Then Dead Sea apples shall, ere I be thwarted.
For I 'll disport in sackcloth and in ashes,

I will forsake all other bright embraces.

MIHRIMA.

As mine were once forsaken? God will never
Again permit the peace that I have found
To break open and bleed. So if indeed
You truly repent, leave me!

MURZINOS. Leave? Leave?
Now I have found all other joys are joyless
Save the one hungry joy of seeing you,
Of melting your cold purity to passion?
I am your husband, and am penitent,
Full to satiety of other pleasures
And of all other beauty. Yes, and ready
To bend, now, to all your tempering
And be made pure. Therefore it behooves you
To yield . . . tho without yearning: . . . .
that can wait.
I will not force your heart to heat and clinging
Or to the tender ardors of my love,
[*Suddenly clasping her.*

But kisses I will have, kisses . . . until . . .

[*So rigidly abhorrent is she, his arms release her. She staggers; then terror takes her.*

MIHRIMA.

Phranzes! Oh where are you! . . . Christ! . . . Christ,

Wipe it from me. . . . . .

MURZINOS. Christ will seal it faster,

For it was at His altar that I had you.

Then will you shame Him? publish with wild lips

To Infidels without that I, your husband,

Seeking the merest love-rites, am denied?

MIHRIMA [*in extremis, for again he approaches her*].

Mother! . . . . . Argoun! . . . . . Phranzes! . . . . . Mother! . . . Mother! . . . .

A VOICE [*at the gate*].

Who calls? Who? Where? Who? . . . . Mihrima?

[*Murzinos falls back chagrined. Hurrying steps are heard and Phranzes enters. His face—that of a mystic—is pale and alarmed. His eyes, cloisters of dreams, stare questioning round him.*

MIHRIMA [*falling at his feet and sobbing*].

My husband! . . . O my husband! . . . O my—

MURZINOS [*comprehending*]. God's Son!

That's the trick, then?

PHRANZES [*confused*]. Let light on this darkness.

[*He lifts Mihrima.*

What has befallen so to stream your hair,
Chastely wont to dwell under its veil?
An hour ago no fear like this foreboded.
Has this Greek stranger threatenings? Or has he
Brought terror tidings fatal to Christendom?
Have Pathan hordes raped, again, the shrines of it,

Destroying faith? If not, why is he here?

MURZINOS [*in the pause*].

That, my lord, I answer for myself.
For tho only a stranger to your walls,
I still can claim to rank as *half* her husband.

[*He turns on Mihrima. The glow without slightly darkens.*

PHRANZES [*dazed*].

Half—? Half—? . . . What is on his tongue?

[*Seeing that Mihrima stands as one in martyrdom.*

Is he beset? Is it some obsession?
Is there a madness in him, Mihrima?
Shall I go bring the bedlam-keeper for him?

MIHRIMA.

My lord, no. You must hear all, at last,
All that has been. And Christ shall be our judge.

MURZINOS [*virulently*].

And Christ will tell you, if she should forget,

That I, a noble, of the city of Constantine,
From whence she is come—that I wedded her there
And still am her unalterable adorer.

[*A deathly pause, then Phranzes reels towards him—so blinded, however, with anguish as to totter. Bewilderment added to his anguish then ensues, and when he finds words they are touched with delirium.*

PHRANZES.

Wake me! . . . do not let me dream . . . so.
[*Wiping his eyes.*
I think this is the house I have dwelt in,
Yet sand-winds of the desert seem about me,
And cruel mirage . . . and no Star, no Star.
I think it is my house . . . for on that wall
Do I not see the worship of the Magi,
And thro that door the sainted Sepulchre?

MIHRIMA [*weeping*].

My lord, yes. And at your feet am I!

[*Kneels.*

I who deceived you, tho unknowingly
At first, and then because . . . . Shrink not from me.

[*He shudders away.*

It was not thro unchastity I failed you.
Let mortal grief not strike so at your heart.

PHRANZES [*throwing himself toward wine-table*].

Wine! wine! Give me drink. I strangle.
The stars which have concealed all drift of this
Seem to be sinking, one by heavy one,
Into my heart—to crush my Star.

MIHRIMA. No, no.

For tho I have been the bride of him who stands there
Led from the convent to him by my mother,
Who . . . . I thought . . . . had told you,

My soul has been beyond his reach or passion
As God in Heaven is beyond all blasphemy.
And since my soul is virgin. . . . .

PHRANZES [*to Murzinos*]. Take her away.
[*Blindly.*

Take her! . . . . Take her . . . . . Unto you were given
Her first bride vows . . . And . . . there are no others.
I have followed a false faith, a false sky.

MIHRIMA [*racked*].

Phranzes!

PHRANZES. I am he, who *was,* no longer.
[*With back to her, he stares through the door at the sunset.*

MIHRIMA [*wavering a space as one in final agony, then as she proceeds becoming religiously ecstatic*].

This is my crucifixion? . . . . It is finished?
Father in Heaven, must I suffer all?

Will you not give my purity the power
Of truth? Will you not prove to him I love
That in my heart You walk—that there Your
garments
Trail untainted as in a Holy of Holies?

[*Silence, only, answers her plaintive plea. Phranzes does not move. The sunset crimsons.*

With increasing ecstasy she turns to the Magi picture.

Will you, O Purple Kings, will you who came
Afar out of the East, wrapping worship
In frankincense and myrrh, will you not hear?
Will you not visit him, now, in a vision
Or send your orient Star at last to him
As a sign that no pollution ever has sullied
The waters of my heart his love has drunk?
O proud, humble Kings, will you not speak?

[*Again she waits, lips moving, and Phranzes turns.*

But now, almost unaware of him she continues, this time taking the crucifix from the table and holding it up—each of its hands in hers.

Then you, O Christ! You, upon the Cross,
As I am on it! You who suffered betrayal
Even as I, your yearning follower,
Will you, whose hands were pierced . . as my heart is . . .
Will you not let your lips utter my truth,
Miraculously moving at my need?

[*Silence, again. And now despair begins in her. Slowly she puts the crucifix back upon the table. Then with a sob she holds her palms out to Phranzes, moaning:*

Do with me as you will. All is in vain.

[*Phranzes seems for a moment about to reply. Then beholding her hands he sees a strange thing and starts, for in them are crimson wounds, like those of Christ.*

With a cry of awe he is on his knees before her, and Murzinos, also seeing, crosses himself.

PHRANZES [*brokenly*].

A miracle! . . . The holy stigmata!

The nail-prints of Christ upon her palms!

The sainted wounds! . . . . My Mihrima! . . . Mihrima!

[*He kisses the hem of her skirt, humbly, passionately. She looks at her hands and realization comes to her. Thrown almost into a trance by it, she stands, not seeing or hearing him—but gazing beatifically before her.*

PHRANZES [*rising when she does not move and running to door left*].

A miracle! A miracle! A miracle!

[*Alexia, Argoun, Leah, come amazedly in. Beholding what has happened, they too stand awed or sign the cross. A chant*

from the Church floats in, growing gradually louder. The sunset rekindles on the Church, the city and Olivet. Phranzes again is kissing Mihrima's skirt.

The Curtain.

THE JUNGLE

Down in the jungle of the mind,
Under consciousness and light,
Where all lost thoughts lie entwined
Like growths in a tropic night,
There are strange and awful aims
Grasping over at the will,
Wanting it with all the strength
Of dead things that are living still.
There are panther-eyed desires
Crouched suppressed in covert caves;
Fears like will-o'-the-wisp fires
Wandering on each air that waves.
Serpent jealousies there are,
Driven to burrow in dank haunts—

On smooth bellies creeping forth
When a mean hope gives them chance.
There are marshes of despair
Where imagination breeds
Bats that have the face of care,
Vultures beaked like evil deeds.
Horrors and confusion cling
Cloudy in the branching gloom.
All things sinister or vile
Find there ready room.

Down in the jungle of the mind
These things are, as all men know.
But among them what fair forms
Out of foulness grow!
Visions that like flowers lift
Chalices of beauty up;
Wingèd wonders magical
As the moon's enchanted cup.
Braveries that seize desires

By their panther-throats and curb them.
Genius-voices so divine
Even death cannot disturb them.
Fawns of joy so fleet of foot
No wild cruel fang can catch them.
Eagle-urges of the soul
Rising where no wing can match them.
Fronds of hope that mount above
All the tangle-growth and slime.
Purposes liana-strong,
Born to reach and clasp and climb.
And, amid them all, the sense
Of the aspiring force of life,
Master of them, in the end,
And of all with them at strife!

SPRING FEVER

A soft wind
Blows from the evening star,
Blows thro budding maples up to my window.
It brings upon its breast, from the April streets,
Voices of children
And of lovers leaning tenderly under new leaves.

A dog bays . . . plaintive, distant, insistent.
Some fibre of him remembers,
As the scented moon floats,
Primitive trails and mating calls
Before he followed man . . . . . .
He bays again and I tremble a little
With wildness, loneness, longing.

There is music somewhere . . . . .
Mellowness . . . . . mute . . . . . everywhere,
Febrile passion pervading the night
Like a tincture, ancient, ineffable . . . . .
A tincture eternally restive.

Anthony! it was this that drove you
To Egypt and Cleopatra.
Abelard, your God was too weak for it!

EVOCATIONS

I

A PAINTING OF MA-LIN

(*Of the Sung Dynasty*)

Just because you painted it so, Ma-Lin,
The rock and the pine tree springing from it and
the water,
And the sampan half fading round
The dark of the rock toward the high cliff
That dimly shadows the distance,
Where birds are only wings,
I know that you loved vanishing things.

And I know you felt as the sampan passed on the
river flowing

That life as a wind in a dream is ever going,
And that its strange sad evanescence
Alone brings beauty's presence.

And I know that the lean of the pine out over the water
Meant to your sense, as now to mine,
The mute mysterious immanence
Of death in the world;
And that, because of death's suffusion,
You longed to think all things Illusion.

Yes, Ma-Lin, brother of mine, I know these things,
Tho a thousand years have flown since then
Under the bridge of the sky,
And tho no longer you look on it, but I.
For graciously thus does the magic of art
Give wings to the heart!

II

IN A CHINESE RESTAURANT

"Chop suey," I say to Ch'ung Li,
Quaint, quiet, and twenty-three,
Who smiles as I wearily enter the door
Thro a curtain of beads and teak.

"Chop suey. Soon," he answers me,
And slips away like wind in the tree
On the lacquered screen in the corner.
But I feel in his eye, still as a stone
In an idol's head on a temple's throne,
A myriad years
Of the Whang-ho,
As it tawnily runs
Under the suns
Of Ho-nan.

For Ch'ung's eye holds, as a jade its hue,
His gods and the long ancestral line
Of the sires he prays to.
And it holds the pines by a tea-house door
At the foot of a mountain age-divine;
And the tea-girl's lute, for the traveller strung,
And the misty moon she plays to;
And even, I think, the memory
Of a sire who one day bowed and poured
Wine for Confucius, and adored
The Sage, foot-sore and weary.

So when I am sick of the noise and heat,
Of the Now, which never is complete,
Of the rude strife in the rude street,
I go to Ch'ung.

III

A CHINESE LOVER PHILOSOPHIZES

Lâo-tse, what does he mean?
That heaven is, yet is not, seen?
A mountain is, yet is not, high?
A cloud, flying, does not fly?

What does he mean? What is life?
Wastes of illusion, sown with strife?
Faith, I know not! But for me
There 's a bridge, in the garden of Pu Li,
That makes, with its shadow in the water,
Willowy water blue with day,
A perfect circle—as with the daughter
Of Li, when I take her hand in mine,

Is made a circle so divine
That time and the world flow thro it!

And only this, not withered lore,
Would Lâo-tse have taught—no more,
Had he loved the daughter of Li!

IV

THE GREAT SEDUCER

Who looks too long from his window
At the gray, wide, cold sea,
Where breakers scour the beaches
With fingers of sharp foam;
Who looks too long thro the gray pane
At the mad, wild, bold sea,
Shall sell his hearth to a stranger
And turn his back on home.

Who looks too long from his window—
Tho his wife waits by the fire-side—
At a ship's wings in the offing,
At a gull's wings on air,
Shall latch his gate behind him,

Tho his cattle call from the byre-side,
And kiss his wife—and leave her—
And wander everywhere.

Who looks too long in the twilight,
Or the dawn-light, or the noon-light,
Who sees an anchor lifted
And hungers past content,
Shall pack his chest for the world's end,
For alien sun—or moon-light,
And follow the wind, sateless,
To Disillusionment!

V

THE LAKE-DWELLERS

I 've never climbed mountains,
Nor sailed across the sea,
I don't know where Llassa is,
Nor Seoul nor Araby.
But every year the wild geese,
With distance on their wings,
Come dropping into Doole Lake
And tell me many things.

They don't speak in Latin,
And Greek is not their tongue.
Their lore is not in any book,
It can't be said or sung.

But when I see them sink down
From star-expectant skies,
I learn what would even make
The fool's heart wise.

They 've been where I 'll never go,
They 'll go as far again.
Yet, tho I 'm but a man, it is
Their wings alone I ken.
For I can see, at Doole Lake,
More than worlds go by
In just a flock of wild geese
That pass along the sky.

VI

THE CHURCH BY THE SEA

A little gray church by the sea,
In a gray, lone little town I know,
Has windows, one, two and three,
With, each, a saint and a verse.
Lush vines climb over the panes,
Saint Paul has leaves twined to his knee.
And more than the sea winds whisper,
Within, to each prayer lisper.

On the roof in a stole of moss
Is a belfry, meek, mellow and wise,
Lifting above it a cross
And tongued with a priestly bell.

Gray paths that wind to the door
Are of shells from the sea's tide and toss,
And a coast-light, calm as a verger,
Greets, near, each seaward emerger.

Soothing to soul and heart
This gray, sad little sea-church is;
For it holds the sacred art
Of being simply itself.
And never can words impart
What calm beauty in that abides;
Nor what ineffable leaven
Of grace, as if from Heaven.

VII

A MAENAD TO A YOUNG PANTHER

Èvoë, come, cub of the panther,
Out of your covert come to me, quickly,
Out of the laurel hiding you thickly,
Into the moonray come!
No lean lance is waiting to pierce you,
As did the hunter's spear your dam.
Hunger is on you; I will nurse you,
Crooning a dithyramb!
Crooning a maenad-chorus, wild:
Milk divine is swelling my breast.
Do not fear to be my child,
Thirst not, in unrest!
Do not fear to suckle of tameness,

Fierce in me are cunning and strength,
Stealth to hide, like you, in the branches,
Spring—and tear, at length!
Èvoë, come, whelp of the panther,
Crushing the young tree rods!
Forth to me come! for courage only
Counts with the fearless gods!

VIII

ANODYNE

(To Josephine Hamill)

The young moon, the evening star and night,
And the wandering wash of the world-circling
tide,
And the level sands, long and low and wide,
Fringed by shadowy palms—
These are things the heart will never forget,
That leave no whisper of sadness or regret,
That make the soul glad to be caught in the net
Of the starry Universe.
For who can behold the young moon sink to bed
On silvery clouds, or hear each billowy verse
Of the tide chant there is neither better nor worse

When men take infinity for their nurse—
Who can hear it and moan?
None! for however worn and sad and lone
We wander the beaches of earth,
No moon has ever set or dawn had birth
But men have found in days and nights a worth
Transcending misery;
And we are sure that beauty is one with health
When it is touched with the Eternal's wealth
Of wonder and peace.
Therefore is beauty the soul's true anodyne
For all the ills that never should have been.

LURID LIVES

I

RASPUTIN

(To his band of court ladies and other satellites)

Build an altar in my chamber,
Spread linen upon the floor,
Let two candles burn.
I am Russia, I am God,
I am God's czar on earth:
You shall be as I!

Build an altar! Bring food,
Bring foam of red champagne.
We shall feast, in a ring,

Chanting hymns around!
Then, communing, cup to cup,
We shall rise like bubbles up,
Rise and float on air!
For by love's might, divine,
You 'll be His, being mine,
You 'll be His. Haste, then,
Let our joys twine!

For, remember this,
You, high and haughty!
I was a muzhik in the wilds,
I was a pilgrim on the roads,
I have sinned, wholly.
And to sinners alone come,
When they pray, spent and dumb,
Blissfulest salvation.
So to you, as to me,
There shall come the ecstasy,
God bids me give you.

Body and soul I will fuse
In you. Then, when I choose,
I will kiss and save you!

Yes! I, a muzhik lowly,
I can do this thing.
Jesus Christ knew a manger.
I to filth am no stranger,
Long I fed as swine:
Till a day men beheld
Might in me, and women enspelled
Led me to the throne—
Where the Czarina sat, palely,
Waiting for an heir.
And to her they cried,
"A saint, of the Crucified,
Who transcends sin!
Bid the Czar hear him,
Tho it be chagrin.

Bid the Czar hear him!" . . .
An heir entered in!

Haste, then! in Christ's name!
I am Russia's holy flame,
I, the sin-transcender!
Ministers of state, or war,
Seek me out, near and far,
Kiss my hands, fawning.
For they know none may dare
Rise against my power.
Over the steppes, in their folly,
They should go, melancholy,
Eating wind and rain!
Over the snow they should go—
To Siberia's pain!

But to all who gather
In my holy band,

There shall come bliss.
They shall dance up to God,
Glide to salvation.
They shall feel the thirst of sin,
Given first to Adam.
They shall eat the apple of Eve,
Then, when they win reprieve,
Joy, past all measure,
They shall know why I teach
Sinners alone to Heaven reach;
Yea, and why fools, who cry
I shall fail and fall, lie!
Haste, then; build our shrine,
With a holy pleasure!

II

A CHICAGO RED

(*In a grain elevator*)

I 've got the sack, have I, and I can go?
I need n't mouth, toothless, about it either?
My fangs are out, you 're guessing, from now on?
By God, and if they are, is n't there reason?
Have n't I bitten enough at hands like yours,
You "wheat king of the prairies," to be toothless?
Have n't I gnawned at cunning lies that strangle
A poor man's guts and tell him slenderness
Of belly 's good—better than rich men's fat?
Have n't I, day and night, never weary,
Sunk my teeth in the gilded rotten heels
Of your curst labor-grinding money-gods? . . . . .

And do you sit there swivelling in comfort,
With twenty million dollars in your pockets
And twenty million thefts upon your soul,
And smile,
And think: "The old goat's Heaven is Bolshevism,
Damn pity he can't go and chew his cud there"?

You do, smug and contemptuous; and you sneer too
That now I 'm off I 'll talk myself cross-eyed!
A lie! It 's looking upon the looting likes
Of such as you, who 're crooked as a hell-claw,
Who only know one straight line in the world—
To the nearest pile of pelf—that twists my eyes!
It 's knowing how you slip the price of bread up,
You and your kind, a thieving cent or two,
And then how, with the profit pouched, you see
Upon each coin only, "In God We Trust,"
Not starving faces staring at your greed—
Women's faces, little wizened children's,

In Europe there, or ever-hungry Asia!
It 's knowing how the jazz of gold deafs you
To the rattle of bones, that are so fleshless worms
Could n't live on them, into unnumbered graves!
By the blood of Truth it is! And what 's your
answer?
"This is a free country. Take away
The right of a man to make all that he can,
Or confiscate his money when he 's made it,
And the spine of civilization breaks in two.
While as for Europe, let her work and pay,
Not war; let spawning China cease to breed
Superfluous hordes if she dislikes famine . . . . .
I had no children till I made a fortune. . . . ."

You pea's-cod of importance, with your "I,"
That 's but a flimsy futile ark of self
Upon the Flood now beginning to rise!
When will you learn the only safety for it—
And for humanity—is to invite

All into it, and then rename it "We"!
When will you learn God gives the soil grain,
Not for your greed, not to be garnered up
In wormy elevators and gambled with,
But to feed hungry lips?
When will you grasp the *new* gospel of Christ,
That workers only shall inherit the earth,
And that rewarded work alone is Heaven?

Never, you think, never, while such flaunters
Of red rags as I, with bile for blood
And dynamite for brains, keep raving it?
Then you will, so help me, when you see
How Revolution that is surging up
Already at the sluice-gates of the world
Shall . . . . .
God! It 's all useless; for no tide
Or rage can ever overwhelm a land
So bloated with the fat of food and fortune!

III

CONDEMNED

What, it is dawn? And the trap's ready? and
you, with the Book?
Round the gray cell I have scarcely time for an-
other look?
Over my eyes the cap will be slipped, in a
moment more?
Only that much of breath is left me, ere thro the
floor
I 'm to be shot . . . and swing on air, over the
ground?
Swing, as a hanged man must, and stare; till
sight 's drowned?
Well then, to it! But, mind; no prating of "God"
at the trap.

God is only the Night that fills the Unknown's gap.

"He is the Resurrection," you answer, "and the Life"?

Vow so when you have slain your friend—and a wanton wife!

IV

SIBYL, TO HER COUNSEL

May you come in? Yes, and all the world.
Now that I know the truth about my shame,
How it is worse than mine, prison will serve
As well as any place to hide it in—
Unless you happen to have a drop of poison
To butter my bread with, and you have n't:
That must be churned, here, out of my heart.
How old am I? . . . You must know? . . . . .
Thirty.
What was my mode of life—and where lived?
A word will answer that, one amorous word
Sipped lusciously from books by you and all men
With keen, secret, orgiastic pleasure:

I 've been since twenty-one a courtesan,
Sunk, at last, to the streets, and so here . . . .
Tho now that I know why, I don't care:
My own image was not upon my soul,
Nor was my own flesh upon my body: . . .
So if the jury you appear before,
You who want me too, like all the rest,
As I can see . . . having so often hunted
The jungle eyes of men for the least stir
Of passion, the least thought of my breast's softness
Or limbs whiteness . . . . . if, I say, the jury. . . .
But that 's no matter . . . that nor anything . . .
Not even in the end who the judge is—
Unless you get God—changing the venue,
If that 's your legal slang, from earth to Heaven:
For none but God can judge the tangled growths
Sprung from the seeds heredity has sown
So blightingly across the generations;

Nor will remembering, as your eyes so plainly
And patiently remind me now to do,
That twelve talesmen will file into a box,
And not archangels, on my day of judgment,
Change matters. For I do. But now that I know
Why I have been a harlot, *why* my body
Has never tended the "vestal shrine of virtue,"
All else is as the futile weight of nothing.
Yes, and, notwithstanding that, I see
How you, the appointed "counsel for the defense,"
And handsome too with the flush of yearning on you,
Would give—like many another who has craved
The scarlet I have but inherited—
All flowers of earth for this red one of Hell.
Yes, I say . . . and yet if I 'm alluring,
Still . . . it is only for what I 've been,

I and my kind, since the first lover's thought
Strayed to a "strange woman" . . . . So if your jury,
Forgetting that, let their eyes slip down
My body, instead of straight into my heart,
They too, desiring, will no doubt accuse
My beauty, that no longer means enticement,
Of having sought even to seduce Justice.
And meanwhile I shall know that in my breast
Only one thought is breathing—with a despair
That is beyond all bitterness: the thought
That lust was my dead mother's wanton trade
Ere I, too, was born a mistress of it,
And that there are no innocent or guilty
Anywhere in the universe, but only
The chain-gang of heredity, bound together
By the helpless sin of all, and tramping the prison
Or highways of life—inescapably.
I shall know this, I say, or if it be

Not so, then God forgive me—or, if He must,
Punish me for each one of all the sins
But one I am guiltless of—bearing children!

V

THE DOCTOR'S ACCOUNT OF IT

Pouring slow digitalis into a phial
For some over-forgetful heart's beating,
He said, "What lay at the root of all was only
Too much belief in God—and yet too little;
For superstition and atheism are born
Of the same mother . . . as you will perceive.

"The apple tree stood there by the well-sweep,
Not wholly withered as now, and with fruit on
it—
The kind of fruit you bite into then drop,
As if thinking of Eve and the Garden of Eden.
And here at the window where we sit sat Jem,

His brooding jealousy as dark and seething
As the cloud that rose behind the wood yonder
And shoved the heat of August down on earth.

"He was looking out upon his wife, Hester,
A morning-glory slip of a thing, I 'd say,
Who had gone to escape his mood out into the orchard
And who stood there by the shrivelled tree reaching
To pluck one of the apples—and he was asking
Himself with sullen pain: 'Can I trust her?
She 's ripe for any man's desire, that 's plain,
And Gary knows it . . . Why then may the smiles
She gives not mean that he already has pluckt her?'
He was asking that; and in a brace of moments
Would likely enough have sunk into a slough
Of remorse, for his shameful thought of her,
Had not the bolt—mind you, from a blue sky—

For the storm still hung stagnant there in the
west—
Had it not fallen,—thunder, and then lightning,
A shivering sharp incandescent flame of it,
And struck her with such fiery jagged suddenness
That she fell down, charred and shrivelled, to
earth.

"Incredible?

To him, yes, as well as you; but also
Quite Biblical, or so he chose to take it:
And medicine for *that* was not at hand.
The funeral in the rain the next day—
When she was laid between a fir and willow
Upon our hill of dank text-ridden tombs—
Was solemn with a sense that God's judgment
Had fallen on some secret wickedness,
And what that wickedness was Jem's jealousy,
Now fortified by fate, no longer questioned.

"When therefore he had turned his mare's head
homeward
From the cemetery, thro the sucking mud
And under dripping hedges, every hoof-beat
And heart-beat drove bitterness into him;
And night blackened bitterness to hate;
And day heated hate to white revenge.
For tho a voice whispered he might be wrong,
That a judgment of God might fall upon the pure,
As blight upon innocent fields of grain,
Another voice told him relentlessly
That God, smiting only one of the sinners,
Who had seared his happiness this side of
Heaven,
Had left the other to be punished by—
He did not say *himself*—tho all his hate did.

"Then came the night he went to seek Gary:
Out past the withered apple, whose charred limbs
Shone gritty in the moon; up thro the wood

That flung dark shadows on his path like spells;
Then down the valley to a cottage door
Draped in unearthly stillness by the gloom.
His heart was beating blindly, the blood pushed
Painfully at the hot base of his brain.
He struck upon the door and had words ready—
Ready as shot—to pour into the soul
Of the opener—as shot rammed in his gun.
But when the door rasped and swung and he sought
To pull the nerve-trigger that should release them
And after them the gun's avenging lead,
When he beheld Gary gravely there
In half-somnambulistic wonder gaping,
Only a ghastly impotent gurgle came
Out of his lips—and apoplectic writhings.
Then he fell down—yes!—as Hester had fallen,
A paralytic, his passion swiftly thwarted,
And was borne into the house, shrunken and helpless.

"He lay there thro the long weeks that followed,
His tongue a moveless clot within his mouth,
His legs will-less logs of misery,
His eyes wandering ever toward Gary,—
Who tended him with pale pondering patience,—
And ever seeking the bitter roots of truth.
Then one day Gary comprehending said,
'Was it that, Jem? You believed her faithless?
Well, man, you wronged her—and have wronged me.'
Whereat the spasm of life left in the dying
Took hold of Jem's dead strangled tongue and cried,
'If it is true, then . . . . . there is no God!'
And with that moan he fell back into silence,
As a stone into a pool, leaving but shudders
To ripple over awe-struck Gary's gaze.

"Too much belief, I say: and yet too little.

But you will pardon me; this digitalis
Demands . . . . ."
He passed with it beyond his door.

BEHIND THE VEIL

I

CHANCE

What is Chance? Circumstance,
Shut for a moment from God's glance?
Hear what happened today,
Then say!

On a pleasure beach a woman stood
And gazed, as, reach upon reach,
I rose in a whirring plane
Till far thro the ether's girth
The glad sea and the green earth
Seemed but joys a bird had dreamed.

She gazed, till down again
In the pilot's hands,
I circled safe to the sands,
And then in a rapture cried,
"I too the skies will ride!"
And mounted the wings, trembling,
Yet trustful as a bride.

And a bride she was—of Death.
For the iron heart of the plane,
Barred—by Chance—of breath,
Missed a beat, then again,
There in the aisles of space.
Then like a thing that has never flown
Cruelly plunged, down, like a stone,
Burying under it flesh and bone,
Mangled! . . . . . .

What, I say, is Chance?
Anarch Circumstance,
Unmastered by God's glance?

II

ALIENATION

A sense of tropic trouble,
Of beauty and fear . . . . I tremble.
For storm swerves ominous northward,
The Gulf gray-green under it,
And pelicans glide on planes of the wind
For a mile with a single wing-beat.
A porpoise, too, scallops the waves
With steel-swift plunges thro them,
While a man-of-war hawk, high in the murk,
Points bow-wings at the moon-wraith.

What is the meaning of it—
This beautiful breath of terror?

Is Life again at a moment of new creativeness,
Which wild things wildly sense the inscrutable
urge of?

Palms seem to know, steeped in the sultry mood
of it,
And the veriest insects driven to shelter in them.
But God, and I, too far from Nature,
Can only tremble and wonder.

III

MISERERE

Wind, rain and thunder last night wildly intoned
A mighty miserere to the skies.
Under a surge of sound the forest moaned
And swayed and crossed itself, penitent-wise.
Its leafy limbs reached out, or clutched and listened,
As still things seem to do, for the next crash.
Terribly then followed the lightning's lash,
And the wet earth, scourged with pallor, glistened.

Infinite seemed the sound along the earth;
And yet beyond lay interstellar space,
To which such spasms are but as the worth

And buzz of a fly's wing—leaving no trace.
Is there no final measure then at all
For greatness? Are our strivings, too, as small?

IV

A COLLOQUY

Said I, with a heart of the sea too full,
"I am weary of wind—and wave—and gull.
There is no more bliss for me in far sails,
And nothing is left, since beauty fails!"

Said I: "With a chest of gold doubloons,
Is God but a miser of suns and moons?
Will He spend no more of them still to give
Me beauty by which alone I live?"

Said I: "He ought, for better or worse,
To spend on beauty the Universe."
Said He: "What else is the meaning, fool,
Of your thirst no quaffs of beauty cool!"

V

PROGRESS

Is it a wave we catch at,
To find that it ebbs only to leave
A little foam in the hand,
A little faith, a little dream,
Luring us on to tomorrow?
Or is it a tide that must be taken
To voyage the Universe?

VI

TO A SEA-ROCK

You are strong, tide-breaking granite,
Not brief and mortally weak;
But can you behold moon, star and planet,
Sands in the great hour-glass of God,
Sift thro space, then to their place
Turn again, with a glory and grace
That make sight seem immortal?

Will you change, then, with me?
Speak!

VII

ART

An invisible Worker
Drives gray nails of rain
Drenchingly into the earth.
He is building floors of grass and pavilions of trees,
To be hued a little hence with the breath of blossoms.
He is shaping his House of Life. . . . . .

I had rather build a blade of grass
Than self-entombing pyramids.

ETCHINGS

I

COLD

Winter . . . and still winter!
Down hill stagger the corn-stooks, heavy with ice.
Sheep in the bottom shiver.

The abandoned barn crumbles with wind and cold.
An elm darns like a crone above it,
With needle limbs that creak and clash
In and out endlessly.
But a rent of the sky still lets the snow in.

And my heart lets in the chill of the years . . .
Of the years!

II

PASSAGE

A dark sail,
Like a wild-goose wing,
Where the sunset was.
The moon soon will silver its sinewy flight
Thro the night watches,
And the far flight
Of those immortal migrants,
The ever-returning stars.

III

MOUNTAIN HARMONY

(Mohonk)

Lights in the valley kindle.
The peaks are dark
And the west ashen.
Night falls silently stark.

The moon is pale and slender;
The moon-star large
And alone as a beacon
New-lit on the day's marge.

The lake is flowing shadow.
The cliffs stand black

And tall and mystic:
To them the wind comes back . . .

And, for a space, whispers
Of day that 's gone;
Then lies down, on the waters,
Till the dawn.

IV

STORM-APPARITIONS

The white breasts
Of poplar leaves
Swim in the wind . . . :
Against the swirl of night falling
They seem as pale as the souls of children
Dead at birth and adrift on Time
From Nowhence to Nowhither.

V

LIGHTS

Thro a rush of rain the rush of a funeral train,
And the pale arm of a headlight pushing
The darkness from its track,
With a swift ghostly sweep,
Into the outer darkness.
Pushing it, as, perhaps, the departed soul,
On its way to the Unknown,
Pushes back Death's inimical darkness.

VI

A MAINE COAST SUNDAY

Idly the seaweed sways,
A gull as idly floats.
The tide is a glass in which the sky
On its blue self dotes.
The light-tower stands inane,
Blind as an owl in the sun,
And stares, without a memory,
At the wreck on the rocks undone.

As idle too are the throng,
Who, by the tide's tone,
Loll at rest, borrowing all
That sun and sea loan.

And Life might well do worse
Than let them lie content
For ever thus, calmed by the soul
Of the blue firmament.

VII

EARTH-HISTORY

A brown spine of rocks,
Like vertebrae of a stranded paleozoic sea-
saurian,
With surf shivering over it.

A sky as pallidly green
As the slime, near, whence primeval life
Climbed and spawned thro the ages
From salt-pools over the land.

A gray surge of seas foaming
Around to the horizon,
With three sails, coming—and going,

To tell the tale of men,
Life's latest spawn, pitted against
The ironic reel of the elements.

VIII

INTERSPACE

Slow wing-beats of a gull, a seaweed swimming,
A mauve horizon hue, silently dimming,
A slender isle far out that foam is rimming—
  An isle the moon
  Tints with a silver tune.

Wan emerald glints like firefly constellations
On every wave, and mystic emanations
Of the wind's voice, and pensive palpitations
  From deeps where soon
  The tide will meeet the moon.

An interspace—ere darkness comes from under
The East, to chill the evanescent wonder,

Ere last day-glimmers fade and float asunder,
And night, the pall
Of the Universe, drapes all.

IX

STILLNESS

Still are the Maine pine woods
When the winds are gone,
Stiller than lakes in them
From all feet withdrawn,
Save from feet of the wild things
That hunt or swim or fly,
And awaken trails of ripples—
That soon as stilly die.

Still are cone and needle,
Fallen upon the moss,
Stiller than time amid them,
Pausing at a loss.

Still are the dead branches,
That have forgotten life,
Still as the last stillness
After earth's last strife.

X

THE SORROW-MAKERS

The moon, prescient of fog,
Pours pallid silver seaward.
A ghostly gull, out over the breakers,—
A gull and I are the only wakers,
All life else is asleep.
The soughing rocks slant to the foam,
The tide turns in, as a heart home;
But moon and tide, fog and gull,
Seem only sorrow-makers.

For the moon 's too still, the tide too loud,
The fog too grieving.
A shroud, only a shifting shroud,
The sea seems weaving.

Out of its breath, as a soul from death,
The gull escaping
Sheers to her nest on the cliff's crest,
And I alone am left,
With my shadow the moon is shaping.

AT A NOVEMBER FUNERAL

West wind, that fanned the flame of Shelley's
heart
Till into high imaginings it broke
And for all hopeless aspiration spoke
Immortally—while spectral leaves were flying!
West wind, over the world shouting and crying,
Ensheathed in the sere shroud of the dead year,
And like a shaken prophet tornly trying
To utter what the inspired alone can hear,
Speak clear!

For now my heart, autumnal, like the world,
Feels flow thro it a spirit like your breath,
That is not life, yet neither is it death,
But of the two a strange commingled essence.

West wind, I shudder at the evanescence
Of all I see and am—yet as you cry
I feel that I am trembling in the presence
Of what can never thro all autumns die.
Say why!

Oh say, for death's dark tears are all too salt,
Too bitterly they stain the burning heart.
How long still must we from our dearest part,
Seeing them vanish on an unseen River?
How long still stand upon its banks and shiver,
Fearing they sink never again to rise?
West wind, is Life, or Death the Master-giver?
Is Death, or Life, the destiny that dries
All eyes?

WILD GEESE IN FLORIDA

Wild geese, was it you that I heard in the Autumn
crying, while leaves were flying?
Was it you I paused to watch in a northern zone,
As high in freezing flight thro the falling twilight
You took your southward way with straining
wing
To these warm everglade waters?

The wild-goose heart of me tells me so,
Tho how it was I do not know!
The migrant heart of me—floating here
Like you amid reedy palms
And cypress knees and winter-tempered calms.

WEST AND EAST

The crescent moon saw thro a window
A mother turning away with relief
From the still-born child they had laid beside her
To childless thoughts of pleasure:
Saw—and hiding her face in a veil
Of clouds hurried away to the banks
Of the Ganges, where the funeral pyres
Are ever fanned with prayers for children.

TRANSIENCY

(To A. H. R.)

Come, let us watch that rock drown in the tide
(So many things must go, so many things!)
Once we were young and the sea was not so wide,
  Or love had wings.

Once we could round the earth without a sail,
(The magic winds are gone, the magic foam!)
Where was the harbor that we did not hail,
  That was not home?

Come, we will watch the moon with thoughts, not
    dreams.
(Whatever goes love stays, love warm and wise!)
Wingèd is youth; and yet—our way *still* seems
  Toward paradise!

AFTER MUCH THEATRE-GOING IN NEW YORK

Open the gates! Open the skyward gates!
My soul is sick of the Highways of Seduction,
With their pawn-brokers of passion, pose and
pander.
Give me again the stars, illumining God,
Not tinsel constellation touting trade.

Open the gates—that face toward freedom
From the dull stupid stench of gaudy decadence.
For I have tryst with a petrel on a wave
To leeward of a green isle that I remember
Six thousand miles across Pacific seas.

THE SKIPPER'S CHANTEY

O did I see a sail, mates, or but a dim wraith of one,
Slanting up the wind toward a nor'-east moon?
Did she come from Italy, from Araby, from Castaly,
Or up out of deeps where the weedy dead are strewn?

Did I see a sail, O! or but a phantom from the ooze?
Three thousand fathoms is n't far for any ghost!
And once every year a sunken ship comes back again
To sail for a misty night some moony coast.

Did I see a sail? I wondered as I gazed at her
If her bows were real—or a death-pale glow.
But ere I could learn O, she went, into gossamer,
Went, past glimmer, into ports I 'll never know!

PASSION

Spring is in the apple boughs,
Spring in the woods.
Rillets run to make the brooks,
Brooks to make the floods.

Birds feel the call of it,
Songful they pair.
I can only sit and feel
A dead woman's hair.

With it I strangled her,
Out of love—or hate.
Spring is in the apple boughs.
I sit and wait.

TO A CERTAIN DEVOTEE

A church bell may ring, but nevertheless
You wish you were dead, with a stone at your head,
A stone sunk deep in the earth's cool breast,
And letters that read, "He wanted but rest."

A church bell may ring, and you may believe
A God 's in the sky—to hear hearts cry,
But nevertheless, if given the choice,
You would choose . . . Oblivion, not God's voice.

AUTUMN WISDOM

Wisdom is on me,
Breathed from a golden moon that Autumn
ripens.
The chill air is empty of all passion.
The streets are lanes where love has been;
Dead leaves cover them.

The wind's sigh is old;
No other voice has the night, save the owl's
In the sycamore of my neighbor
Between me and the moon.
There is no call of far things or wild things,
For the urge of the year is spent,
Or changed to resignation.

I do not think of Helen of Troy,
Of Juliet's balcony—and joy,
But of Saint John on Patmos . . .
Of Antoninus tenderly mystic
Toward a mad Universe . . .
Of sinking stars. . . . . .

STRENGTH IN EXTREMIS

Fog—night—surf—wind—rain—
And in my brain
A ceaseless surge of pain.
Dawn, and a windy sea, wilder still;
But the rocks—unshattered—
And my sure will!

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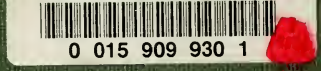
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